DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 513 JC 800 400

AUTHOR Knepper, George W.
TITLE A Model for the Community College? The Municipal University Movement.
PUB DATE 12 Apr 80
NOTE 13p.: Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Eastern Community College Social Science Association (Baltimore, MD, April 10-12, 1980)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; College Role; Community Colleges; *Educational History; Financial Support; Governing Boards; *Higher Education; *Universities; *Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS *Municipal Universities

ABSTRACT

Municipal universities may be defined as baccalaureate degree-granting institutions controlled by a board on which the public is heavily represented, and supported in whole or in part by local tax resources. The 14 schools that once fit this description did not appear in any single chronological period or geographic region, but each shared the distinguishing features of local tax support and local control. These shared features were paralleled by a common rationale in support of municipal higher education: young people would stay at home; the low cost of living at home and the low fees would extend educational opportunity; courses were practical; graduates would provide the city with needed manpower; universities would bring money and purchasing power to the city; and the university would serve as a center for civic culture. Despite these benefits, the municipal university movement never gained great popularity, because of the large population and tax base needed to support such an institution. Shortly after World War II, municipal universities, unable to meet the returning veterans' educational demands using only city tax resources, began to be incorporated into state educational systems. While community colleges share many of the same characteristics of the municipal college and are different in other respects, the community college has definitely inherited the commitment to increased educational access pioneered by the municipal university. (AYC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED191513

A Model for the Community College?

The Municipal University Movement

by George W. Knepper

Paper presented at the
Eastern Community College Social Science Association Conference
Baltimore, Maryland
April 10 - 12, 1980

JC 800400

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

George Knepper

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"A Model for the Community College? The Municipal University Movement"

by

George W. Knepper

It is not often in human affairs that one can watch an institutional pattern that had existed for generations come to a complete and seemingly absolute halt. But those of us who are middle age and over have lived through the hey-day of the municipal university movement and have then seen the rapid and complete phasing out of this type of educational institution. Only fourteen universities, at one time or another, could claim municipal sponsorship. Among them were schools that provided extraordinary services and which were in large part responsible for fixing upon American higher education many of its current patterns and practices. It is important, therefore, to look briefly at municipally sponsored higher education, not only for its own sake, but also because it was a bridge between those public educational services provided by the state universities and those provided by the multitudinous public community colleges of today.

A municipal university may be defined as a baccalaureate degree-granting institution controlled by a board on which the public is heavily represented, and supported in whole or in part by local tax resources. It enrolls only graduates of standard high schools, and, in addition to a college of liberal arts, it is likely to have one or more professional or graduate schools. The distinguishing characteristics, of course, are local tax support and local control.

The fourteen schools that fit this description did not emerge in any single chronological period or geographic region. The first to appear on the scene, The College of Charleston (South Carolina), was a private college

taken over by the City of Charleston under state legislation passed in 1837. After 1881, the college no longer strictly qualified as municipal in control; ultimately, it returned to private status and later became state supported. The University of Louisville assumed its municipal character in 1846, but its program was confined to medicine and law until 1906 when a college of arts and sciences was finally added. CCNY, The College of the City of New York, one of the best known of the municipal schools, started in 1847 as The Free Academy, but college level work did not flourish until the name was changed in 1866. When the charter for a Greater New York City became effective in 1897, CCNY served an enlarged municipality. Its responsibility, shared somewhat after 1870 by Hunter College, was reduced further by the opening of Brooklyn College in 1926, and Queens in 1937. The University of Cincinnati grew out of a number of root institutions. By 1870 it was organized under a charter derived from state enabling legislation. A true municipal university emerged in Toledo in 1909. It evolved from a manual training school founded thrity-seven years earlier. In Akron, a hard-pressed Universalist school, named Buchtel College, transferred its assets to the city and became The Municipal University of Akron in 1913. This terse summary does not include Wayne, Washburn of Topeka, Wichita, Omaha, or Midwestern, but it is sufficient to show the diversity of municipal university origins.

Although the roots of each institution were quite distinct, municipal universities shared certain characteristic features. Each existed in accordance with "specific statutory authorization." Only Ohio governed municipal universities under a state code that was broad enough to permit a number of Ohio cities to form such institutions. Perhaps that accounts for the emergence of three strong institutions in a state that already was well supplied with state-supported colleges. Each municipal university was controlled by a

board representing the local public. In some cases the Board of Education shared control. Generally board members were appointed by the mayor, by city council, or by the board of education, or some combination of them. There was no uniformity to the size or complexity of these boards. Among the boards' essential duties was to secure adequate financing. Each institution was supported in part or in whole by municipal taxes. State codes or city charters usually imposed limits upon the level of taxes levied in support of municipal universities. In most cases capital resources for campus and plant development were secured through special tax levies.

These common features of finance and contol were paralleled by a common rationale in support of municipal higher education. None of the reasons used for supporting municipal higher education were unique to these institutions. Public high schools and state colleges and universities used the same arguments to secure public support. Briefly, the reasons commonly cited in support of municipal universities were: young people would stay at home under parental influence; the low cost of living at home and the low fees would greatly extend educational opportunity; courses were more practical than at conventional colleges; graduates would stay in the city and thus provide trained manpower for its needs; many students could work their way through college and this would enhance their respect for honest labor; universities would bring money and purchasing power into the city; the city would benefit from university services provided at low cost; the public school system would be upgraded as it strove to prepare college bound students more effectively; teacher training would be improved thus benefitting city schools; and, finally, the university would serve as a center and catalyst for civic culture.

Is there any evidence that these ideals were realized? Yes there is. The records of each municipal institution show that many of these goals were reached. A handful of illustrations will have to suffice here. A 1912 survey at the University of Cincinnati revealed that nearly sixty-one percent of the students "could not have attended a university outside the city." Cincinnati's famed co-op program, quickly adopted by Akron and several other municipal institutions, trained students to meet the city's needs and often kept graduates in the city. Professional schools poured physicians, lawyers, teachers, engineers, social workers, and many other specialists into the life of the city. Municipal universities did become cultural catalysts in the communities they served. Testing bureaus, municipal reference bureaus, libraries, speech and hearing clinics, psychological testing, legal reference services, and other special services were provided to the city at no cost or at minimal cost.

This emphasis on public service was characteristic of municipal universities. It has often been said by their supporters that municipal universities (and in more recent decades urban universities generally) have provided for the city a range of supportive services analogous to those provided farmers by the state agricultural colleges. Municipal universities led the way in providing city dwellers with evening courses and full degree programs, with summer sessions, Saturday classes, radio and television classes, part-time degree programs, and a range of adult services designed to extend collegiate educational opportunity to learners of every age. It was somewhat amusing to note, in the post-WW II era, how private institutions were "discovering," with great hoopla, that whole realm of public services to non-traditional students which had been commonplace on municipal campuses since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the first third of this century, when municipal universities were gaining strength and broadening services to their sponsoring cities, why did not more American municipalities support higher education? There were many reasons. It was generally believed that only cities of considerable size (100,000 and over) had a large enough population and tax base to support a university. (Charleston was the smallest city with a municipal university; its support level was lowest and the university's program the most modest. Akron had just 70,000 inhabitants when the city took over Buchtel College in 1913, but by 1920 its population had exploded to 208,000.) Chicago established municipally supported community colleges. Other cities, like Cleveland and Youngstown, had YMCA-sponsored colleges with objectives somewhat similar to those of municipal universities. Many large cities had private colleges and universities in their midst. These schools did not welcome competition from public institutions, and local citizens used their presence as an excuse to avoid taxation in support of a public institution. The issue of double taxation was raised. Why, it was argued, should citizens who already were taxed in support of state colleges and universities further tax themselves to pay for local public higher education? Existing state schools did little to encourage municipal universities, seeing them as possible competitors for tax support.

One might also wonder how municipal universities were perceived by the working classes and by recent immigrants. How typical was CCNY's mid-twentieth century reputation as a conduit into the professions and respectable jobs for New York's upwardly mobile Jews? Did poor Appalachian whites, for example, use the low cost education available at the University of Akron for these purposes? The Akron example may not be typical, but in the 1920's and 30's, so many students clambored to get into the university that its spaces were

oversubscribed. To sort out this demand, entrance requirements were raised repeatedly. The Depression intensified competition since many sons and daughters of well-to-do Akronites stayed home instead of attending a prohibitively expensive private college. One result was that Akron was more difficult to get into than virtually any other Ohio college, including those with strong academic reputations. This certainly created an intellectual elite, if not a social elite in the municipal university. To what extent then were potential students closed out or scared off by conditions within municipal universities? No studies, to my knowledge, have been made of this interesting and significant question.

The beginning of the end for the muncipal university movement came shortly after WW II. A host of returning veterans--the G.I. Bulge--swarmed to the low cost, readily available municipal campuses, and in every case seriously overtaxed limited staffs, facilities, and financial resources. Federal and state subsidies and bonuses funneled unprecedented amounts of money into the operation of these institutions. Taxpayers responded well to the immediate postwar needs by voting building levies and raising operating funds "to help our veterans." A superficial prosperity thus created led to great expansion of these campuses: superficial because the veteran's support money soon dried up in large part. Then, after a brief slump in the early 1950's, enrollments started to rise steadily and spectacularly as college age students flocked to the campuses in ever increasing numbers. By the late 1950's it was evident that city tax resources could not keep up with the need. Virtually all state systems of higher education were expanding rapidly. It was politically feasible to argue that municipal universities should be incorporated into state systems; they should become regional in scope, offering inexpensive education to thousands of students from beyond the city's corporate limits, and relieving city dwellers of one local tax burden.

Initiative for this move came primarily from municipal university officials who saw state funds as their only salvation. Wayne University in Detroit provided a model by becoming first a county wide university and then, in 1958, becoming Wayne State University. Louisville and Omaha became part of their state universities. Akron and Toledo gained state assistance in 1963 and full state status in 1967. In 1961 CCNY, Hunter, Brooklyn, and Queens were absorbed in the City University of New York funded in large part by the state. The last holdout, Cincinnati, a school that had flourished under municipal auspices, finally entered fully into the state system of Ohio in 1977.

All of the former municipal universities still exist. They are bigger and more diverse in their services than ever before. And yet, they by no means have any special lock on providing public educational services for the cities in which they are located. Nearly all share responsibility for public higher education with one or more community colleges, supported in whole or part by public tax monies coming from the community, and serving many of the same functions that were served, and are still being served, by former municipal universities.

For purposes of this paper, the community college is defined as a publically controlled institution, funded by public tax monies, offering free or low cost services to a diverse student population, and maintaining programs that terminate below the baccalaureate level.

How can community colleges find adequate support from cities that were unable to support long-standing municipal universities? What, if any, needs do they meet that the universities could not, or did not meet? Is there evidence that community colleges are the beneficiaries of the municipal

university movement, or do they represent a new thrust in American higher education?

Although the first community colleges were founded more than a half-century ago, their great growth has occurred in the last thirty years. This corresponds with the period during which municipal universities reached their fullest development and then metamorphosed as local tax resources became inadequate to their growing needs. These institutions had grown while the industrial cities in which they were located grew in size and tax revenue. Most of these cities, however, ceased to grow appreciably, and they began to lose people and tax producing businesses and industries to surrounding areas. The remaining tax resources were not sufficient to support the expensive needs of large, complex, research-oriented institutions with extensive and costly physical plants.

Most community colleges, on the other hand, starting fresh and hence not hemmed in by previously-imposed limitations, were able to acquire a reasonable level of local funding to carry out programs which, initially, were not so costly as those maintained by the universities. The extensive use of existing school buildings for classrooms, the absence of expensive libraries and computer facilities, the heavy use of part-time instructors, were among the features that allowed the community college to shave costs and therefore to live on the local tax resources. In many cases these cost savings have disappeared as community colleges secured impressive new physical plants and facilities, hired full-time faculties, built expensive parking facilities and athletic plants, and generally expanded and upgraded their operations. These expensive developments are possible because the community college taxing district often embraces an entire county or even a multi-county area, thus including those rapidly growing regions surrounding the core cities.

The school's growth corresponds to the growth of the tax base. Obviously, in the inordinately complex world of the community college, this description does not fit all institutions, some of which, especially those in the larger cities of the east and midwest, do not benefit from a rapidly expanding tax base; they face the same growth-inhibiting conditions that plagued the municipal universities. Some have been kept solvent by the infusion of state tax money.

It is possible that the community colleges' ability to survive and prosper is related to more than obtaining adequate financial support. The urban poor and dispossessed may well have been intimidated by the thought of moving directly from a high school to a baccalaureate program. Educators sometimes forget that their own view of the openness and accessibility of low cost, public higher education is not always shared by those who come from educationally deprived backgrounds. For the latter, the intimidating leap from high school to a baccalaureate program in engineering, pre-law, arts, humanities, sciences, and so forth can be lessened if there are, readily available in their general neighborhood, a variety of post-secondary courses in subject fields that seem reachable, practical, that lead directly to a job. Two years of criminal justice sounds less intimidating than four years of sociology. To become a nurse's aide seems within reach; to enter a degree nursing program with its mathematics, chemistry, and core cultural requirements seems less possible. Another way of saying this is that much of the public support for community colleges derives from the practical, vocational, short-term character of their programs, and this appeal is not limited to those who are educationally disadvantaged.

Today, there are many close relationships among community colleges and nearby four-year colleges and universities. One unique arrangement was

pioneered in Ohio by the University of Akron. The community college for the greater Akron area is simply an integral part of the larger university. Programs in the community college receive the same state subvention as do programs in other state-related two-year institutions. By using the same campus, library, computer, student center, and even sharing faculty, the two year and four year programs avoid much of the duplication and competition that occurs when separate two and four year public institutions are situated close to one another.

In his book, Profile of the Community College, published in 1972, Charles R. Monroe states: "The greatest possible error anyone can make about the community college is to mistake it for just another college or another technical institute, or an extension of the high school. The community college has its own peculiar purposes and goals and its own destiny to fulfill."

While I agree with this sentiment, it would be well to avoid overemphasizing the uniqueness of the community college. It is clearly one contemporary manifestation of America's long history of extending educational opportunity and secularizing education. As with the municipal university movement, the contemporary community college seeks to extend educational opportunity through convenient location, low costs, development of new types of collegiate education and training, and a catering to the needs of non-traditional students. Again, like the municipal university they are secularizing forces. They are supported by public monies and controlled by public boards. They are not beholden to any religious or political persuasion. Did community colleges, then, self-consciously model themselves on the municipal universities? As yet I have found no evidence that they did, but certainly in this imitative world of ours there is every likelihood that the work of the municipal universities in providing public higher educational opportunities for urban

people has been absorbed into the very being of contemporary, urban community colleges.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
ERIC® CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES
96 POWELL LIBRARY BUILDING
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024
EE 36

SEP 26 1980